

'Allies are more important than ever'

OARC attorney Catherine Shea humbled by recognition, knows importance of perseverance

By Zak Bratton

When asked why she spends so much time fighting for the community, Catherine "Cat" Shea took a long pause as she looked outside her office window. After taking a deep breath, she shrugged her shoulders before producing a smile, "Because it's the right thing to do."

Shea works as Assistant Regulation Counsel for the Office of Attorney Regulation Counsel, a title she's held since 2013. Outside of the office, Shea has been making waves. First as President-Elect of the Colorado Womens Bar Association (CWBA) and most recently by receiving the Ally of the Year award from the Colorado LGBT Bar Association.

An active member in the community and various bar associations since 2010, Shea dedicates a large chunk of her time to volunteer activities.

Every two weeks on Saturday afternoon, she spends a couple hours delivering meals at no cost to those suffering from life-threatening illness through Project Angel Heart. Shea, who has continued to donate her time for nearly five years as a volunteer meal delivery driver, said she enjoys making connections and interacting with the clients she meets.

Started in 1991 as a grassroots community response to help those suffering during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Project Angel Heart also hosts cereal drives to fill their clients' breakfast and sells pies for an annual Thanksgiving fundraiser both activities Shea participates in. She has also volunteered for the Women's Homeless Initiative.

Time spent with community and volunteer activities builds toward a greater cause of creating equality among all members of society, Shea said. One that starts with making allies.

"It's not enough to just feel a certain way in your heart or think something is right in your head, you've got to stand up and do something. Allies are more important than ever," Shea said. "To be an ally and an advocate for people who are not in a position to advocate for themselves or those who need a voice to amplify their voice."

Recently appointed as President-Elect of the Colorado Womens Bar Association, Shea said she hopes this opportunity will also allow her to make a difference in the community. She will be tasked with leading the organization beginning in 2018 by not only continuing daily operations, attending board meetings, and representing the CWBA at various events, but also thinking outside the box when it comes to behind-the-scenes policy work.

"We need to represent all women, regardless of race, class, or sexual orientation and make sure we take those things into account when looking at public policy decisions or programming," Shea said. "We need to look across the spectrum when contemplating issues involving our organization by being mindful of the breadth of the women's community."

Ultimately, Shea said she credits Jim Coyle, Attorney Regulation Counsel, and her office for supporting her efforts to give back to the community and become the leader she is today, many of which take her away from the office for periods of time.

Prior to her appointment as President-Elect, Shea already had experience in leadership positions. She previously served as Secretary of the CWBA as well as former chair and co-chair of several of the organization's committees including the Judicial Committee, Legal Services Committee, and Membership Committee. She has also served on the CWBA's Board of Directors since 2010.

Shea was also a former secretary and co-chair of the Denver LGBTQ Commission, First Responders Committee member, current Gender Identity Center of Colorado Board of Trustees member, and 2015 Denver Sheriff Recruitment Committee member. In 2015, she also graduated from the Colorado Bar Association's COBALT program, a highly-selective statewide leadership program which continues to train about 20 attorneys a year since its inception in 2007.

Before joining the Office of Attorney Regulation Counsel, Shea served as an Assistant Attorney General for the State of Colorado in the Business & Licensing Section for nearly five years. She received her undergraduate degree from Western Kentucky University and her law degree from the University of Michigan Law School. After graduation, Shea clerked for the Honorable Robert D. Hawthorne at the Colorado Court of Appeals.

Zak Bratton is the Education and Outreach Coordinator in the Office of Attorney Regulation Counsel.

